

A HUZHU MONGGHUL (TU) WOMAN'S LIFE: QIXINSUU (1924-1982)

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ABSTRACT

My paternal relative, Qixinsuu, was born in 1924 and passed away in 1982. To learn more about her life, I interviewed my father (Limuzhunmaa, b. 1942) on 13 September 2018 in Tughuan Village, Danma Town, Huzhu Tu (Mongghul) Autonomous County, Qinghai Province, PR China. I also interviewed Qixinsuu's adopted daughter, Zhunmahua (b. 1953), on 24 September 2018 in Pudang Village, Danma Town. I recorded both interviews using an audio recorder. Later, I listened to the audio, took notes in Mongghul, and wrote this text in English.

KEYWORDS

Himalaya women history, Huzhu, life narratives, Monguor biography, Monguor history, oral Tu history, Qinghai-Tibetan Plateau

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FIG 1. Zhunmahua (b. 1953), illiterate, farmer, Qixinsuu's second adoptive daughter (Zhunmahua's home, Pudang Village, Danma Town, Huzhu Tu Autonomous County, Qinghai Province, PR China, 24 September 2018, Limusishiden).



FIG 2. Qijangdanzhuu (b. 1948), illiterate, farmer, and Srangtawa's oldest son (Qijangdanzhuu's home, Smee Village, Wushi Town, Huzhu Tu Autonomous County, Qinghai Province, PR China, 12 November 2018, Limusishiden).



FIG 3. Courtyard interior of Qijangdanzhuu's home where he lived with his family (Qijangdanzhuu's home, Smee Village, Wushi Town, Huzhu Tu Autonomous County, Qinghai Province, PR China, 12 November 2018, Limusishiden).



FIG 4. People.

Name	Dates	Description
not known (QJF)	?	Qixinsuu's father-in-law, Qijangtsirang's father
not known (QM)	?-1925	Qixinsuu's mother
A Caicai	?	a wealthy agro-pastoralist in Shdazang Taiga, Tiantang Town, Tianzhu Tibetan Autonomous County, Gansu Province
Lamuhua	b. 1939	first daughter of Warimaniruu and Rnqanshiji
Limusishiden	b. 1968	Limuzhunmaa's son, author of this paper
Limuxja	1949-2018	third son of Warimadanzhuu, and later husband to Zhunmahua and Qixinsuu's son-in-law
Limuzhunmaa	b. 1942	one of Qixinsuu's mother's parents' grandsons, also Limusishiden's father
Nangbog	~1936- 2000	Qixinsuu's adoptive son (also the second son of Warimadanzhuu)
Niiga	b. 1941	Qixinsuu's first adoptive daughter (also the second daughter Warimaniruu and Rnqanshiji)
Qijangdanzhuu	b. 1948	Qixinsuu's nephew (Srangtawa's oldest son)
Qijangtsirang	1897-1981	Qixinsuu's father (QM's husband)
Qixinsuu	1924-1982	the subject/protagonist of this article
Rnqanshiji	1915-1990	biological mother of Niiga, Qixinsuu's first adoptive daughter (also wife of Warimaniruu)

Srangtawa	1923-1984	Qixinsuu's older brother, her only sibling
Warimadanzhuu	1911-1973	Warimazhaxi's oldest brother and biological father of Nangbog, Qixinsuu's adoptive son
Warimaniruu	1914-1958	Warimazhaxi's second older brother and biological father of Niiga, Qixinsuu's first adoptive daughter
Warimazhaxi	1917-1991	Qixinsuu's husband
Zhunmahua	b. 1953	Qixinsuu's second adoptive daughter, adopted in 1959
Zushiba	b. 1933	monk, Qixinsuu's husband's older brother's first son

INTRODUCTION

When QM¹ was about thirteen-years-old, she was sent to live in her husband's home in Smee Village, Wushi Town. This was a very unhappy time in QM's short life. When her daughter, Qixinsuu, was two years old, QM mysteriously died in her husband's home in Smee Village. Her death was most likely the result of her husband's (Qijangsirang) odd, cruel, and selfish behavior. After QM's death, two-year-old Qixinsuu was taken to her maternal grandparents' home in Tughuan Village, Danma Town. Later, when Qixinsuu was about thirteen-years-old, her maternal grandparents arranged for her to move into her groom's (Warimazhaxi) home in Pudang Village.

Unable to give birth, Qixinsuu and her husband adopted Nangbog and Niiga from her husband's brothers' homes. Qixinsuu's husband's family was extremely impoverished and heavily in debt. Looking for a better life, they went to today's Shdazang Taiga area, Tiantang Town, Tianzhu Tibetan Autonomous County, Gansu Province.

¹ I was unable to locate anyone who knew the name of Qixinsuu's mother. For that reason, I refer to her as QM in this text.

In their ninth year in Shdazang Taiga, their adopted children were taken back by their biological parents. Devastated, Qixinsuu and her husband returned to their former home in 1958 and adopted Zhunmahua from a relative. When she reached marriageable age, Qixinsuu and her husband searched for a young man to become their son-in-law and move into their home. At this juncture, Qixinsuu's husband's brother stirred up trouble. Wanting to inherit Qixinsuu's family's property, he proposed that Zhunmahua marry one of his sons.

Later in life, as Qixinsuu was returning to her home, she met her father by chance. After decades of separation, they were briefly reunited until Qijangsirang's difficult behavior led to a final separation.

Qixinsuu had five grandchildren and eventually paid off all her family's debts.

QIXINSUU'S FATHER AND PATERNAL GRANDFATHER

QM began an unhappy life once she moved to her husband's (Qijangsirang) home. Like his own father (QJF), Qijangsirang had no sense of family responsibility, was extremely selfish, for example, eating wheat-flour bread by himself in his home, left home whenever he wanted, did no housework or fieldwork, provided no money to his family while spending lavishly on himself, for example, purchasing robes and gambling, and scolded and beat his wife. Qijangsirang also had a poor relationship with his own father. Both father and son were *hguandii*.¹

In 1923, a year after QM's marriage, she gave birth to a son, Srangtawa. A boy child pleased the family. Nevertheless, QM continued to be abused. In an attempt to leave her husband, she fled to her parents' home. Believing she should stay at her husband's home because she had given birth to a son in her husband's home, her

¹ A *hguandii* 'red lama' is capable of both good and evil, can summon and command evil, and can send illness or misfortune to a certain person or a particular community. For more on this practitioner, see Limusishiden (2015:87).

parents sent her back to Qijangsrang's home. Some days later, after more abuse, she again fled to her parents' home with her son but was again sent back.

After a particularly difficult period, QM once more fled to her parents' home, cried desperately, and declared that she would not return to live in her husband's home. A couple of months later, QM's parents' *warishidang* 'clan'¹ met and decided two elder women from Tughuan Village would escort QM and Srangtawa to Qijangsrang's home. The clan head instructed the escorts before they left, "If her husband says, 'Please take your daughter (QM) back to your home, I don't like her,' then tell him to invite two respected elders from their clan to his home. Bring QM back immediately if the two elders agree."

When this group reached their destination, Qijangsrang angrily declared, as predicted, "Take your daughter back to your home. I don't like her!"

"Fine. Please ask two respected old men from your clan to come here. If they agree, we will take our daughter to our home immediately," one of the old women, having been prepared for this situation, said to Qijangsrang.

Qijangsrang lacked the courage to ask two elders from his clan to come to his home. QM was not guilty of any wrongdoing, thus, all the responsibility for this separation would have fallen on Qijangsrang and his father. Qijangsrang's clan members were very familiar with Qijangsrang's and his father's problematic behavior. At that time, the power of clan members in Mongghul society was significant and conflicts and disputes were solved by clan members. Eventually the two old women returned to their homes empty-handed, leaving QM at her husband's home.

QJF had a powerful aversion to seeing women urinate, which he believed was disgusting and extremely bad luck. If he noticed a woman urinating or heard of this happening along the route he planned to take, he stayed at or returned to his home the whole day and only left the next morning, or he might have turned and walked in the opposite direction taking a long detour. Consequently, QM had to

¹ There is no specific name for this clan.

carefully urinate in and out of the family compound¹ to avoid encountering QJF. Taking advantage of this, Srangtawa, who did not like to accompany his grandfather, lied that a woman had urinated outside her home gate when QJF wanted to go somewhere and take Srangtawa with him. This had the immediate desired effect as QJF would surely not leave his home that day.

QJF buried valuables outside his home compound at night, an activity his neighbors were aware of. They secretly watched for this and dug up what he buried. Other odd behavior included never allowing his seat on the family *pei*² to be coated. Normally, a Mongghul family coated their *pei* once every two or three years with a mixture of mud and bits of wheat straw.³ As time passed, the surface of a *pei* became rough and uneven, which is why a family periodically resurfaced it. However, QJF refused to allow his seat on the *pei* to be coated. Over the years, his seat was noticeably sunken.

A year after Srangtawa's birth, QM was pregnant with Qixinsuu. Again, beaten by Qijangsirang, she fled to her parents' home and in 1924, while there, gave birth. Two months later, QM was sent back to her husband's home with her infant daughter.

A year later, in 1925, Qixinsuu's maternal grandmother from Tughuan Village started off to visit her daughter in Smee Village. She reached Naguu Plain, which is near Smee Village, and met an old woman from QM's clan and learned that QM had died several days earlier. The old woman didn't know the details of the death. Qixinsuu's maternal grandmother was shocked and wept. A bit later, she returned home after telling the old woman that she would never come again to

¹ Before 1949, Mongghul had no toilet in their home. Urination and defecation were done in the pigsty and outside the home compound.

² Traditionally, Mongghul used a *pei* in the kitchen, which was divided into two parts by the *langang* 'low wall'. The first part was for cooking, and the other half was the *pei*, or raised platform, where all the family slept at night. Made of adobe bricks, the *pei* was warmed by heat from the kitchen fire passing through channels to the chimney or a fire fueled by animal dung and straw that burned in the center of the *pei* (Limusishiden and Jugui 2010:26-27).

³ The straw strengthened the coating.

Naguu Plain – a place that had brought great misery to her daughter and her unexplained death.

QM's death remains an enigma. However, QM's isolated grave suggests that she did not die naturally as those who died from suicide or from deadly infectious disease were not buried in the ancestral graveyard, but buried separately some distance away.

Soon after her mother's death, Qixinsuu was sent to her maternal grandparent's home because Qijangsrang did not want to care for her. Qixinsuu was thus cared for by her maternal grandmother in Tughuan Village.

QIXINSUU'S MARRIAGE

When Qixinsuu was thirteen, her family proposed that she marry Warimazhaxi from Pudang Village. However, Qixinsuu's relatives refused because Warimazhaxi's family was so impoverished that they could barely eke out a living. At almost the same time, a man from Szanghuali Village, Donggou Township came to propose and Qixinsuu's relatives accepted. The groom's side promised to give a fine colt as a betrothal gift. It was agreed that the wedding would be held during Spring Festival.

Qixinsuu's relatives felt that they should report the marriage to her father. Learning that the groom's side had promised a fine colt as a betrothal gift, Qijangsrang delightedly exclaimed, "Great! I will make Qixinsuu's dowry chest."

For unknown reasons, the groom died in Szanghuali Village before the marriage. Once they learned this, Warimazhaxi's relatives approached Qixinsuu and again proposed marriage. This time, despite Warimazhaxi's family's poverty, Qixinsuu's relatives agreed. One compelling reason for this was that Mongghul girls were denigrated if they were unmarried by the age of fifteen, an age Qixinsuu was approaching.

When the new marriage situation was reported to Qijangsirang, he asked, "Is Warimazhaxi family's well-off? Will they give a fine colt as a betrothal gift?"

"No. Their family is too poor to offer a colt," the man answered.

Qixinsuu's father shook his head and said nothing.

In the end, nobody from Qixinsuu's father's side participated in her wedding.

When Qixinsuu married and moved to her husband's home, his family had nothing except several dilapidated rooms inside a rundown earthen compound. Suffering from hunger, they often borrowed food and money from relatives, neighbors, and villagers. Nevertheless, Warimazhaxi was a quiet, kind man who loved Qixinsuu. They had a harmonious life.

ADOPTING CHILDREN AND MOVING TO TIANZHU

Qixinsuu agonized over the fact that she was childless. When she was about thirty years old, Warimazhaxi's clan suggested that Warimazhaxi's oldest brother, Warimadanzhuu, give his second son, Nangbog, to Qixinsuu and Warimazhaxi as their adoptive son. Warimazhaxi's older brother, Warimaniruu, also gave his second daughter, Niiga, to be their adoptive daughter. This family of four was very poor and deeply in debt, consequently a decision was made to move to Shdazang Taiga, Tiantang Town, Tianzhu Tibetan Autonomous County, Gansu Province where they might earn some income and repay their debts.

One of Warimazhaxi's cousins, who had earlier fled to Shdazang Taiga to avoid being forcibly conscripted into Ma Bufang's¹ (1903-1975) military forces, facilitated their move. With the cousin's assistance, they became *zhuangtou* 'outsiders' who made a livelihood by farming land for a rich agro-pastoralist named A Caicai.

¹ An important member of the Ma family who lived in Xining until fleeing to Hong Kong in 1949.

Meanwhile, Qixinsuu and Warimazhaxi worked hard in the fields and sent Nangbog to attend a private school in a local home. After a couple of years, they had earned enough to buy land and build their own compound yard and rooms. They planned to live there permanently. However, in the early spring of 1958, Warimadanzhuu visited, declaring, "I'm here to take Nangbog back to my home because my first son, Zushiba (b. 1933), has gone to Rgulang Monastery¹ to be a monk."

Nangbog was then taken away. Though the couple was devastated by this development, Niiga was still with them and they thought after she got older, they could find a man to marry her and live with them and thus they would be cared for in their old age.

Unfortunately, two months later, Niiga's mother, Rnqanshiji, visited and declared, "My husband died this year. I have come to take my daughter to live with me. I need Niiga because my first daughter, Lamuhua, has married and now lives in her husband's home."

Despite their pleas, Rnqanshiji took Niiga and left.

Qixinsuu and Warimazhaxi were again childless and very worried. Additionally, news of their children being taken away quickly spread in Shdazang Taiga. Hating the brothers and their wives who had taken away their adopted children, Warimazhaxi and Qixinsuu sold their property and returned to their former home.

In autumn 1958, the couple moved into their former compound and a year later they adopted Zhunmahua, a relative of QM's parents in Tughuan Village. Qixinsuu and Warimazhaxi loved Zhunmahua and after many years of hard work, Qixinsuu and Warimazhaxi's conditions improved.

When Zhunmahua was thirteen years old it was decided to find her a husband who would live in Qixinsuu's home. At this juncture, Warimazhaxi's oldest brother, Warimadanzhuu, appeared again and said, "Don't find a husband from other areas! I'll give my third son,

¹ Rgulang is a Dge lugs Monastery located in Sitan Village, Wushi Town, Huzhu Tu (Mongghul) Autonomous County, Qinghai Province. Pu (2013:71-75) reports 396 monks in 1957 while Smith (2013) reports "over 300 monks" (291) and also "340 monks" (293).

Limuxja. Limuxja and Zhunmahua will inherit your property and carry out your funeral duties!"

Qixinsuu and Warimazhaxi were forced to accept this proposal because Warimadanzhuu persuaded clan members to insist that Qixinsuu and Warimazhaxi agree. Nevertheless, they understood that Warimadanzhuu's true purpose was to eventually inherit their property. Furthermore, Warimadanzhuu would spend less on the wedding because his son was moving into his wife's home.

Qixinsuu, Warimazhaxi, and clan members made a written agreement in Chinese and "signed" it with their fingerprints to further affirm that Zhunmahua was Qixinsuu and Warimazhaxi's adoptive daughter and Limuxja was their adoptive son. A main clause of the contract¹ stipulated that Zhunmahua would inherit most of the family property while Limuxja's portion was a small amount, in case the marriage failed and the couple separated.

QIXINSUU MEETS HER FATHER

One afternoon several years later, Qixinsuu was walking to her home from shopping in Danma Town. She stopped and rested along a sloping path on a hill. An old white-bearded man wearing a white felt hat and a reddish-brown long robe with a *daleen*² shoulder-bag slung over his right shoulder approached. "Grandfather, where are you from? Please rest here," Qixinsuu said, standing up to show respect.

¹ Zhunmahua kept the agreement in her dowry chest until she burned it in 2000, thinking it had no value.

² *Daleen* refers to a long narrow woolen bag that is often slung over a person's shoulder or across the back of a pack animal. Certain Amdo Tibetans say *ta len*. Amdo refers to certain northern and central Tibetan areas (portions of the present Qinghai, Gansu, and Sichuan provinces) and also denotes a major Tibetan dialect (Limusishiden and Stuart 1998:44).

"How are you, Aunt? I'm from Smee Village in Fulaan Nara,"¹ the old man replied, putting his *daleen* on the ground and sitting beside Qixinsuu.

"Do you know an old *hguandii*?" Qixinsuu asked curiously.

"There are many *hguandii* in my village," the old man replied.

"His wife was from Tughuan Village. She died after giving birth to two children. His son's name might be Srangtawa," Qixinsuu replied.

"That's me! Srangtawa is my son," the old man exclaimed, curiously fixing his eyes on Qixinsuu's face.

Qixinsuu bowed her head and began weeping.

"Are you Qixinsuu?" the man asked in surprise.

Qixinsuu nodded her head.

"You are my daughter," announced the old man.

This was the first time Qixinsuu could remember having seen her father who had lived alone in Smee Village after conflict with his son. Following this chance meeting, Qijangtsirang moved into Qixinsuu's home, but his selfish, eccentric, and individualistic behavior continued. For example, although Qijangtsirang had moved to Qixinsuu's home he later said to Warimazhaxi, "You painted my wooden chest for storing flour. Scrape off that paint!"

Warimazhaxi refused, at which point Qijangtsirang announced he would return to Smee Village, and arranged for some people to move his furniture from Qixinsuu's home back to Smee.

Qixinsuu continued to be very kind. For example, a young woman in Qixinsuu's village was maltreated by her mother-in-law to the extent she was driven out from her home and forced to stay outside. A couple of days later, she was so hungry and weak that she lay at the foot of a hill. Noticing this, Qixinsuu, with her *basi arog* 'dung-collection-basket' on her back, walked to the young woman and surreptitiously handed her a piece of highland barley bread. Qixinsuu

¹ Fulaan Nara includes today's Wushi Town and the townships of Hongyazigou and Songduo of Huzhu County and Dala Mongghul Township of Ledu Region, Haidong City (Haidong Region became Haidong City in 2013). Historically, Fulaan Nara residents spoke a unique Mongghul dialect.

knew the young woman's mother-in-law would scold her if she learned what she had done.

Many years after Qixinsuu's death from tracheitis¹ in 1982, this woman mentioned to Zhunmahua how Qixinsuu had given her bread at a very difficult time in her life.

Zhunmahua gave birth to three sons and two daughters.

In my own blurry memory, Qixinsuu was thin, of medium height, and wore a long dark robe and dark blue scarf. We children were very excited when she visited us, especially when she brought fruit from her home's cherry, plum, and apricot trees that ripened around the mid-eighth lunar month. She was a kind, sweet old woman who spoke gently. Limuzhunmaa (b. 1942) addressed Qixinsuu as Aajii 'Elder Sister'.

Divination by a monk from Rgulang Monastery after Qixinsuu's death indicated that Qixinsuu's *funiizi* 'soul' went to a home north of Qixinsuu's home and that this home had a yellow dog and seven people, a description matching my home.²

¹ It was believed that the tracheitis was due to breathing smoke from the time she was a baby and had slept on a *bankang*. The latter refers to part of a heatable adobe platform that was divided into a *yikang* and *bankang*. An opening was made at the center of the *bankang* to make it easier to add fuel. Five to six planks covered the opening once the heating materials were inside and then could be removed a couple of days later. See Limusishiden and Jugui (2010:38) for more on the *yikang* and *bankang*.

² However, no one in my family is understood to be an incarnation of Qixinsuu.

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NON-ENGLISH TERMS

A Caicai 阿才才, a person's name

a mdo རྩର୍

aajii, ajie 阿姐, elder sister

bankang 板炕, a sleeping platform

basi arog, dung-collection-basket

Dala 达拉 Township

daleen, ta len དାଳେନ dalian 裕裢, a long narrow woolen bag often slung over a person's shoulder or across a pack animal's back

Danma 丹麻 Town

dge lugs དྔྱ ཉྱ

Donggou 东沟 Township

- Fulaan Nara, a place name
galeng, round baked highland barley flour pancakes
Gansu 甘肃 Province
Haidong 海东 City
hguandii, local religious practitioner
Hongyazigou 红崖子沟 Township
Huzhu 互助 County
Lamuhua, a person's name
langang, low wall
Ledu 乐都 Region
Limusishiden (Li Dechun 李得春), a person's name
Limuxja, a person's name
Limuzhunmaa, a person's name
Ma 马, a surname
Ma Bufang 马步芳
Naguu, a place name
Nangbog, a person's name
Niiga, a person's name
pei, shaokang 烧炕, a heatable raised platform
Pudang, Pudonggou 普洞沟 Village
Qijangdanzhuu, a person's name
Qijangsirang, a person's name
Qinghai 青海 Province
Qixinsuu, a person's name
Rgulang, dgon lung byams pa gling དොෂනුදුලුම්පාග්ලිං; Youningsi 佑宁寺, a monastery name
Rnqanshiji, a person's name
Shdazang Taiga, Dazongtai 大宗台 Village
Sichuan 四川 Province
Sitan 寺滩 Village
Smee, Ximi 西米 Village
sngags pa ཟණ්ඩ
Songduo 松多 Township
Srangtawa, a person's name
Szanghuali, Nianxian 年先 Village

taligha, rtsam pa བྲାଙ୍ଗ

Tiantang 天堂 Town

Tianzhu 天祝 County

Tughuan, Tuguan 土官 Village

Warimadanzhuu, a person's name

Warimaniruu, a person's name

Warimazhaxi, a person's name

Wushi 五十 Town

Xining 西宁

yikang, a heatable sleeping bed

yuuhua, steamed highland barley flour twisted rolls

zhuangtou 庄头, outsider

Zhunmahua, a person's name

Zushiba, a person's name